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To: Person(s) working on the topic of TV rating systems or persons assigned as liaisons with the FCC

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cc: ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, and the FCC

Subject: A TV rating scheme based on dual-use of the network ghost logos: location coding

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Abstract:

A method is described to replace the new "Valenti" TV rating system. It is simpler, requires less learning, and avoids other shortcomings of the current rating system. It uses a location code (one of 4 positions) rather than the "verbal" 6 code system that was just recently introduced. It does not introduce new codes for the user to learn; it makes dual-use of the "network ghost logos" currently in use. It also provides a continuous, as opposed to intermittent, display of the rating code, providing the parent with an immediate knowledge of the show's suitability as he or she enters the room or switches to a new station.

Requirements of a TV rating system:

- Easy to learn, no practice or experience
- Uses a simple coding scheme
- Requires little to no literacy
- Usefully and realistically differentiating, with no more levels or codes than the number of different courses of action that a typical parent makes (e.g., unaccompanied and unrestricted viewing; time-limited viewing; accompanied viewing; and prohibited viewing).
- Continuously visible & present but doesn't clutter the screen
- Not based heavily on the English language and word meanings, should be based on generally understood examples

Shortcomings of the current "Valenti" system:

- Too many separate/discrete codes to learn (6). Differences between the 6 different levels are too subtle and not easily learned, nor easily remembered. Levels are based on age groupings and not content or maturity level and they do not seem to be consistently applied or provide much

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predictability in terms of content. They fail almost every test in terms of what a coding scheme should be. The more levels or codes that the system has the more often inconsistencies seem to appear, lowering the viewers' confidence in and use of the rating system. Small subtleties between the 6 codes are not immediately apparent or meaningful for those who did not design or champion the system. Subtleties have to be learned; the average parent will make no such effort; in summary, the current codes are over-engineered.

- The number of codes exceeds the number of response options the average parent has at his or her disposal. The number of responses should determine the size of the coding scheme.
- Symbology complicated, largely English-based.
- Generally presented or visible only at the beginning of the show or intermittently after extended commercial breaks.

Proposed replacement rating system:

- The code size is limited to 4, based largely on the maturity level of the content. The average parent doesn't treat or discriminate among extreme violence or extreme profanity language or extreme sexual content; their responses are highly correlated among these 3 types of content. That is, the average parent doesn't have one response for extreme violence and a different one for extreme profanity. A parent's response is more determined by volume or "concentration" of mature content than by anything else.
- No new symbology has to be designed or learned; the proposed rating system uses the location or placement of the "network ghost logos" currently used to identify the network being viewed; no new visual clutter is being introduced to the TV screen.
- Position of the network logo tells you the rating. Based solely on ordered position. Only 4 codes are used. Two ideas are presented below; both are based on the spatial position of the network logo.
- Alternative 1, the network logo's position in height would be positively correlated with "maturity of content." The higher the logo on the screen, the more mature the content. Four discrete locations will be used, all locations will hug the far right side of the TV screen: at the bottom, 33% of the way up; 66% of the way up, and all the way at the top.

Top: Over 18, mature audiences only; NYPD Blues
partial nudity; any blood scenes

66% up: Sexual innuendo; words that wouldn't be
heard in church; shooting humans

33% up: Shooting cartoons, any crime situation
Bottom: Mary Poppins (almost universally known)

- Alternative 2, the network logo's position could move between the 4 corners of the TV screen (say, in clockwise fashion beginning in the lower left corner...moving like a speedometer display, see attached drawing).
- With both alternatives, the codes are not based on English language or complicated symbology; this technique couples an already familiar continuous perceptual dimension (height or location) with a continuous dimension of maturity. The association will be almost immediate and will require absolute minimum of learning. With alternative 1, height of the logo is correlated with maturity (maturity is also broadly associated with physical stature, at least across age groups).
- Symbol will always be present and visible allowing the parent to determine the show's suitability immediately upon entering a room. This is typically a more likely scenario than a parent who is present at the beginning of a show or a parent who pre-screens all shows using a program guide. The proposed system better suits the most common situation.

Evaluation and Research Questions:

- While parents indicate in surveys that they want content specific indicators in a TV rating system (i.e., differentiate between violence and sexual content, or between sexual content and profanity, etc.), in practice, do they actually respond differently to these types of content, or do they instead respond more predictably and proportionately to the concentration or "volume" of the mature content?
- Informal interviews with parents indicate that parents typically use 4 different responses to control TV watching: unrestricted/unlimited viewing; time-restricted or limited viewing; accompanied viewing; and prohibited viewing. Are these results generally applicable to the larger population (on average)?
- Can 4 spatial codes be more easily taught and remembered among a broad range of viewers than the current 6 "linguistic-based" codes?
- Should the codes be ordered clockwise among the corners, or along one side?

Alternative 1: height in the field

Schindler's List
NYPD Blues

Cheers
Home Improvement

Power Rangers

Mary Poppins

Alternative 2: Corner/clockwise positioning

